The John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education (Gardner Institute) recently received a $2.1 million grant from Ascendium Education Group to develop and launch the Governing Board Equity in Student Success Project. The effort will be developed and delivered in partnership with the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). The 3.5-year effort will allow the Brevard-based Gardner Institute and Washington D.C.-based AGB to work together to develop a Governing Boards Equity in Student Success Academy. The grant also funds deeper equity-focused work with a select number of institutions participating in a modified form of the Gardner Institute’s Retention Performance Management (RPM) process.

The Governing Board Equity in Student Success Academy will be designed to provide professional development and learning experiences for those leaders who serve as governing board members of America’s colleges and universities. The overall goal is to ensure that our nation’s trustees have a greater awareness of the challenges, opportunities, and strategies that colleges face in achieving equitable student success outcomes, including retention, graduation, and post-college employment. The deeper work with select institutions in a modified form for the Gardner Institute’s RPM process will complement the efforts undertaken in the Academy. Both the Academy and the RPM work will occur in a yet-to-be-selected state. The state will be chosen and announced in the first third of 2021.

“In our work with student success we have recognized the need and potential for better governing board engagement in both institutional student success and equity efforts,” stated Drew Koch, the Gardner Institute’s President and Chief Operating Officer. “We believe the two foci must be intentionally connected. You cannot have improved student success without having more students from historically marginalized populations succeed. This is a huge priority for all educators, including institutional governing boards.”

“We are thrilled to be working with AGB on this important project,” added John N. Gardner, the Gardner Institute’s Board Chair and Chief Executive Officer. “We could not ask for a better partner than AGB in this essential work. We are so thankful for Ascendium Philanthropy’s support to make possible this partnership and the work that the partnership will support.”

“These efforts to engage board members in educational opportunities around equity and student success are central to AGB’s ongoing initiative promoting justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion inside and outside the boardroom,” said Henry Stoever, AGB President and CEO. “We are excited to work alongside Ascendium as well as the Gardner Institute in establishing a collaboration with board members to explore their responsibilities for these issues.”

The Governing Board Equity in Student Success project commenced on November 1, 2020. Initial organization effort is now actively occurring between the Gardner Institute and AGB. The state in which the work will transpire shall be announced in the first third of 2021, with the project commencing in that state in spring or summer 2021. "Ascendium believes that board member engagement is a critical component of an institution’s student success efforts,” said Ascendium Vice President - Education Philanthropy Amy Kerwin. "We’re excited about the work the Gardner Institute and AGB will be leading to deepen the connection between trustees and institutional leaders with respect to student success reform efforts designed to improve outcomes for learners from low-income backgrounds."
About the Gardner Institute

The John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education is a non-profit organization dedicated to partnering with colleges, universities, philanthropic organizations, educators, and other entities to increase institutional responsibility for improving outcomes associated with teaching, learning, retention, and completion. Through its efforts the Institute strives to advance higher education’s larger goal of achieving equity and social justice. Specific focus is given to helping institutions develop and implement strategic action plans for first-year, second-year and/or transfer student success; improving teaching, learning and success in gateway courses; and conducting professional development focused on advancing educational excellence. For more information, visit www.jngi.org.

About AGB

The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) is the premier membership organization that strengthens higher education governing boards and the strategic roles they serve within their organizations. Through our vast library of resources, educational events, and consulting services, and with nearly 100 years of experience, we empower 40,000 AGB members from more than 2,000 institutions and foundations to navigate complex issues, implement leading practices, streamline operations, and govern with confidence. AGB is the trusted resource for board members, chief executives, and key administrators on higher education governance and leadership.

About Ascendium Education Group

Ascendium Education Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color and veterans. Ascendium's work identifies, validates and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system and state levels, with the intention of elevating opportunity for all. For more information, visit ascendiumphilanthropy.org.

For more information contact Katie Locke, Director of Marketing and Communications, Gardner Institute, locke@jngi.org

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